
Taking Our Hearts to the Lord

Scripture Sharing Group Resource, Advent 2020.

WEEK 1

Reader 1: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark (Mk 13:33-37)

Stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming.

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man travelling abroad: he has gone from home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own task; and he has told the doorkeeper to stay awake. So stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

This is a challenging time. The global Covid 19 pandemic continues to pervade every society, community and extended family. It's a time that calls for vigilance, something also called for by Jesus in today's gospel. We are accustomed to messages encouraging us to wash our hands, wear face masks and keep our distance. Many of us comply mindful of the consequences for ourselves and others if we do not. Many of us are equally vigilant regarding the avoidance of serious sin. We are old enough and mature enough to know it too has consequences.

Over recent decades the Church has sought to support us expand our awareness of sin. A greater emphasis is now placed on the presence of sin in the structures of our societies, necessitating both personal and societal conversion. We are asked, for example, to take matters like re-cycling and other good environmental practices seriously. It is not sufficient to bemoan the ill-effects of climate change. We must identify a concrete action we can take to help alleviate the difficulties.

As stewards and children of God's household today's Gospel invites us to exercise our initiative as best we can. God works on the principle that we are not strangers to Him or to one another. We share in the divine calling to renew the face of the earth through acts of charity and penance.

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

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WEEK 2

Reader 1: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark (Mk 1:1-8)
Make his paths straight.

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

“Look, I am going to send my messenger before you;
he will prepare your way.
A voice cries in the wilderness:
Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight,

and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, “Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

Once again the prophetic words of Isaiah are proclaimed. Those who hunger a life-giving word or caress from God, especially in these touch-less Covid times, are reminded that an ancient and enduring promise has been fulfilled. The great messenger foretold by Isaiah has come and gone but his words linger because they are a vehicle of the Holy Spirit as he seeks to renew us in Christ this day, this place, this hour.

Once again we are told of the dominant theme of John’s preaching – that one more powerful than him would come after him, one who would baptise, not with water, but in the same Holy Spirit.

Once again we gather, not by chance, but through God’s graciousness. The One more powerful than John has already communicated himself to us. Not only that, but He has begun something in each of us, something a long time in the planning, something glorious. Even now our ‘salvation’ is underway. We are forever drawn into His own glorious self-giving life. We are invited to be people of hope, courage and joy, accepting of God’s willingness to step into our lives and lead us toward our true destiny. Whatever our problems in life, we retain the right to be confident and particularly to celebrate ‘Emmanuel – God with us.’

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

Group returns to page 28 of Advent Booklet

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WEEK 3

Reader 1: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John (Jn 1:6-8,19-28)

There stands among you, unknown to you, the one who is coming after me.

A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light.

This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" he not only declared, but declared quite openly, "I am not the Christ". "Well then", they asked "are you Elijah?" "I am not" he said. "Are you the prophet?" He answered "No". So they said to him "Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?" So John said, "I am as Isaiah prophesied:

a voice that cries in the wilderness: Make a straight path for the Lord.

Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him, "Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah and not the prophet?" John replied, "I baptise with water; but there stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo this sandal-strap". This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection on the Gospel

In today's Gospel John the Baptist wastes no time in redirecting his listeners to Christ. He describes himself to them in words crafted centuries earlier by the prophet Isaiah 'a voice that cries in the wilderness: Make a straight way for the Lord.' He presents as nothing more than a messenger highlighting that there stands among them – unknown to them – the one who is coming after him; the one whose sandals he is unfit to undo.

What causes anyone to be so self-effacing and emphatic? And why the air of urgency? Here it is good to recall that John is speaking to people whose curiosity has been aroused, people awaiting a saviour. He reminds them that real joy, the kind that breathes peace of mind and fulfilment, even in the face of challenges and difficulties, is to be found in knowing, loving and serving God and living justly with the people God invites us to share life with.

This Advent we have sought to draw close to Christ through our sharing in a Scripture Sharing Group and by entering a conversation with the Lord based on this resource. We can be certain that He desires to deepen our friendship with Him. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us draw close to Him.

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

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WEEK 4

Reader 1: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke (Lk 1:26-38)

“Listen, you are to conceive and bear a son.”

The Angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph of the House of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. He went in and said to her “Rejoice so highly favoured. The Lord is with you”. She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, “Mary, do not be afraid. You have won God’s favour. Listen, you are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the house of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end. Mary said to the angel, “But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?” “The Holy Spirit will come upon you” the angel answered “and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God”. “I am the handmaid of the Lord” said Mary “let what you have said be done to me”. And the angel left her.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Silence

Leader: Let us read the Gospel passage aloud together.

Everyone: A Reading from the Holy Gospel

Silence

Leader: Let us listen to a short reflection on this Gospel passage.

Reader 2: Reflection

Today’s Gospel reminds us that Christ entered our world through Mary’s acceptance of a request from God. We are reminded that she was deeply disturbed by the Angel Gabriel’s invitation. She may well have experienced a few sleepless nights and though her consent in faith may have been immediate, it is very probable that needed time to come to terms with her decision.

That’s one side of the coin. Now let us consider the other. The God of all creation has promised fallen humanity a saviour. He has decided this saviour as well as being divine will be fully human so that we will be better able to relate to Him. He plans ahead and over a thousand-year period communicates His intent through his prophets. Then when the time of fulfilment arrives, he does not impose Himself on an unsuspecting young woman but awaits her ‘Yes’, her willingness to participate in the great divine plan.

Over the coming days, in the lead up to Christmas day, each of us is likely to have our own moments of disturbance and concern. We may experience them as an intrusion or a welcome distraction but let’s not allow them distract us from the great invitation of Christmas.

The saviour born of Mary seeks to come again to us, to make his home with us, to share life with us. Let us take a moment to prepare our response.

Silence

Leader: I invite you to share any thought or consideration prompted by the Gospel passage and /or the reflection.

Sharing

Leader: Let us return to our Advent Prayer.

Group returns to page 44 of Advent booklet.